

Olufemi Adediran
ABEOKUTA

Ogun: One dies, seven injured as smugglers, Customs clash

One person died yesterday while seven others sustained injuries during a clash between personnels of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) and suspected smugglers along Sagamu Interchange/Abeokuta Expressway, Ogun State.

New Telegraph learnt that the smugglers, conveying bags of foreign rice to Samagu from Abeokuta, ran into Customs officers from the Federal Operations Unit (FOU), Ikeja, Lagos, who intercepted the product.

The Customs officers were reportedly resisted by some hoodlums said to be working for the smugglers, leading to an exchange of gun fire between them.

Among those who sustained bullet injuries are three Customs officers and a soldier.

Three suspected smugglers also sustained gunshot injuries.

New Telegraph also learnt that the Customs operatives enlisted the help of soldiers who joined them in the ensuing shootout.

A source told New Telegraph that the victims were rice traders and not smugglers.

He said: "We buy rice from Abeokuta here and sell to our customers in Sagamu. Whenever we get our goods from here and when we see Customs on the road, we normally do bookings with them.



The victim

"But to my surprise this morning, after doing the booking, on our way, after Siun junction, another set of Customs intercepted our goods from the same office, the Federal Operations Unit (FOU).

"We were like 'what happened? We met your people over there. What happened?' They called soldiers for backup. Soldiers squatted on the road and started shooting. Four people were injured."

But the FOU spokesman, Theophilus Duniya, described the development as a mob attack on

the Customs officers by hoodlums "working with smugglers".

Duniya said the operatives, acting on intelligence, intercepted six vehicles laden with foreign parboiled rice on Abeokuta Expressway on Tuesday morning.

"Upon the interception, some armed hoodlums working with smugglers swiftly mobilised themselves and attacked our officers in their bid to prevent the seizure from being taken away. However, in the cross fire that ensued, our operatives overpowered them and

were able to evacuate three out of the intercepted vehicles to the warehouse."

Duniya said three Customs officers and a soldier sustained some bullet injuries from the attack, but was silent on the number of those who died.

The spokesman said the wounded officers were currently receiving treatment at Customs medical facility, while further investigation into bringing the perpetrators of the attack to book had commenced.

He added: "The Ag. Controller is very concerned about the injuries inflicted on the officers which were totally avoidable if only the youth were patriotic enough to know that the officers were just performing their lawful duties. He also cautioned the youth to reject being used by economic saboteurs to confront operatives of the Service from carrying out their lawful duties.

"DC Usman Yahaya, while thanking the law-abiding citizens for supporting our operations, also warned people with criminal

intentions to immediately desist from such because officers/men of the Unit are well-mobilised, backed up by the extant laws and shall remain resolute at enforcing the laws without fear of intimidation."

However, angry rice traders mobilised and stormed the Governor's Office, Oke-Mosan, Abeokuta, in protest against the attack.

They demanded urgent intervention of the government to curb incessant attacks by the Customs.

Addressing the protesters, the Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Tokunbo Talabi, promised immediate interface with relevant authorities to bring to an end such occurrence in the state.

He also promised that the medical bills of the four victims would taken care of by the state government

Talabi applauded the peaceful nature of the protest, noting that the well-being of every resident of the state was the priority of the current administration.

One killed during attack on herdsmen in Ogun